

**Foreign Policy White Papers and the Role of Canada's Parliament:  
Paradoxical But Not Without Potential**

Gerald J. Schmitz

Principal analyst, international affairs  
Parliamentary Information and Research Service  
Library of Parliament, Ottawa

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## Introduction to the Paradoxical Actor on the Hill

The observations that follow draw on several decades of direct experience working with that paradoxical, and sometimes overlooked, actor in the foreign policy development process, namely Canada's Parliament. During that time concerns about the alleged weaknesses of parliamentary oversight of the executive have become a commonplace complaint. They seem also to be a staple assumption in the academic discourse on Canadian foreign policy, when the legislative role merits any mention at all. (Frequently it does not.) Yet if one believes the renewed rhetoric emanating from high places about redressing "democratic deficits" in the Canadian body politic, this was all supposed to change. At the end of 2003, a new prime minister ushering in a new management regime, or at least a different style of governing, said that he and his government were committed to changing the way things work in Ottawa. The minority parliament elected by Canadians in June 2004 provided a more vigorous test of that promise than he had in mind. Increasingly fractious parliamentary circumstances and regional party divisions have also made minority government more likely in the foreseeable future.

In a recent essay lamenting a perceived chronic lack of parliamentary vigilance in defence and security matters, Douglas Bland and Roy Rempel suggest that: "Perhaps as Canada matures as a liberal democracy free from 'democratic deficits', then the question – Does parliamentary oversight matter? – will no longer need to be asked."<sup>1</sup> The Canadian parliament remains a "paradoxical" actor because our constitutional mythology of "parliamentary supremacy" seems belied by the ongoing disappointments of a much lesser actual ability to exert control or effect policy change, especially in traditionally executive-dominated areas. Canadian governments, at least the majority ones that have been the usual state of affairs<sup>2</sup>, continue to exercise a relatively free hand to decide as

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Bland and Roy Rempel, "A Vigilant Parliament: Building Competence for Effective Parliamentary Oversight of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces," *Policy Matters*, vol. 5, no. 1, Institute for Research on Public Policy, February 2004, 55.

<sup>2</sup> Prior to the current minority parliament there had been nine at the federal level lasting in total for only about ten of the 137 years since Confederation. See Peter Dobell, "What Could Canadians Expect from a Minority Government?", *Policy Matters*, vol. 1, no. 6, Institute for Research on Public Policy, November 2000, 6-7.

they see fit, and to ignore parliamentary advice – even all-party recommendations – whenever they so choose.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond expecting parliament to do its duty and approve the legislation and spending plans submitted to it, governments from time to time find it useful to seek parliamentary support for their international policy positions. But on its own, parliamentary participation and advocacy in relation to international issues and objectives may ultimately count for little in determining state actions and budget allocations, notwithstanding substantial evidence of public support for a more engaged internationalism<sup>4</sup> combined with serial episodes of enthusiasm for “democratizing” reforms. Parliamentary and public inputs have generally not had much impact on the organizational means and other instruments of foreign policy implementation. In terms of results or outputs, the question posed by one insider following the 1994-95 reviews and white papers remains as pertinent as ever: “Will democratization lead to more effective diplomacy, or is it a pressure-release valve designed primarily to placate a citizenry disillusioned with unaccountable bureaucrats and unresponsive politicians?”<sup>5</sup>

Even in the case of promising innovations in other comparable Westminster systems, such as Australia’s Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, Kim Nossal’s and Ann Capling’s case study of its recent experience suggests “that turning to parliamentary institutions will not necessarily overcome a democratic deficit or lead to a more democratic foreign policy process.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Nossal underlines that Australia’s recent experience with foreign policy white papers has, in contrast to Canada’s, been explicitly and unapologetically executive-driven. At the same time, the addition of elaborate

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<sup>3</sup> As Thomas Hockin once summed up the paradox: “It is not surprising that some people get a little confused about parliamentary democracy in Canada. We are told that Parliament is sovereign, but we know that major decisions on policy are made elsewhere. ... How are we to come to terms with this great gulf between appearances and reality?” (“Adversary Politics and Some Functions of the Canadian House of Commons,” in Orest Kruhlik et.al., *The Canadian Political Process*, Holt-Rinehart and Winston, Toronto, 1973.)

<sup>4</sup> Don Munton argues that public opinion should be a spur to the politicians. As he puts it: “Politicians and officials have not only the option to argue for and pursue more internationalist policies but also an incentive to do so. Initiatives of this sort will generally be met with strong public support from the well-springs of internationalism in the Canadian public.” (“Whither internationalism?”, *International Journal*, vol. 58, Winter 2002-2003, 178.)

<sup>5</sup> Evan Potter, “Widening the Foreign Policy Circle: Democratization of Co-optation?”, *bout de papier*, vol. 13, no. 1, Spring 1996, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ann Capling and Kim Richard Nossal, “Parliament and the Democratization of Foreign Policy: The Case of Australia’s Joint Standing Committee on Treaties,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 36, no. 4, September 2003, 850.

consultation efforts including the involvement of parliamentarians does not, in itself, alter similar power realities in the Canadian case. Hence solutions are not obvious to parliament's paradoxical dilemma of supremacy in principle yet often marginal powers in practice to shape the direction of policy.

### **Out of the Shadows and Silences?**

Canada's parliament has sometimes been overlooked as a foreign policy actor because, while its frailties are frequently noted, its actual work has typically failed to receive much substantive media, or academic, attention. That may be starting to change. For example, Ottawa's weekly diplomatic magazine *Embassy*, which began publishing in early 2004, devotes extensive regular coverage to parliamentary views and activities.<sup>7</sup> The next volume in the annual *Canada Among Nations* series will also include a chapter I have co-authored addressing the parliamentary role in foreign policy reviews and reorganizations.<sup>8</sup>

A decade ago, the parliamentary dimension somewhat paradoxically was not examined in detail in the 1995 *Canada Among Nations* volume on the theme of "Democracy and Foreign Policy" that followed the publication of the Chrétien government's "white paper" statement *Canada in the World*. While references were made to the hearings of the Special Joint Committee Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy, and Kim Nossal's chapter did seem to advocate more meaningful parliamentary involvement in reaching what he called the "elusive" goal of democratization<sup>9</sup>, most of the attention was not to parliamentary views and processes *per se* but to the involvement of NGOs and "civil-society" actors in relation to the adequacy and credibility of public consultation mechanisms as a whole.

In the debate over foreign-policy "democratization", others then and since have urged critical caution regarding what Claire Turenne Sjolander has referred to as its

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<sup>7</sup> The contents can be accessed at [www.embassymag.ca](http://www.embassymag.ca).

<sup>8</sup> Gerald Schmitz and James Lee, "A Parliamentary Lens on Canada's Foreign Policy Framework in Transition", in Andrew Cooper and Dane Rowlands, eds., *Canada Among Nations 2005: Splitting Images*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, forthcoming.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Kim Richard Nossal, "The Democratization of Canadian Foreign Policy," in Maxwell A. Cameron and Maureen Appel Molot, eds., *Canada Among Nations 1995: Democracy and Foreign Policy*, Carleton University Press, Ottawa, 1995, 29-43.

“siren call”.<sup>10</sup> Not only should we be careful what we wish for, but some also decry what they see as a tendency to substitute increasingly wishful projections of Canadian ideals for genuine debates around the real choices facing policymakers in advancing Canadian interests abroad.<sup>11</sup> Presumably one can infer that it is on such choices that Parliament also needs to speak up and be heard if it wants to be seen to matter more. The dubious, or sometimes absent, image of parliamentary institutions suggests that there is a lot of ground to be made up in order for them to make a visibly forceful impression as the “voice of the people” within the arena of foreign policy deliberations.

The 1998 *Canada Among Nations* volume included a telling anecdote on MPs and foreign policy by historian John English, who was a member of the 1994 special joint committee reviewing Canadian foreign policy. His observations underscored some of the weaknesses and limitations of parliamentary roles that could act as a constraint on legislators’ contribution to those reviews. As he recounted an incident from the 1994 “National Forum” that preceded the work of the parliamentary committees established to conduct the foreign policy and defence consultations:

Someone asked the chair: “Who are those people at the back?” She replied sternly: “They are Members of Parliament. They may stay but they cannot speak.” Although NGO representatives and academics were vocal, Canada’s elected representatives were stifled. The ambiguity of public representation was clear.<sup>12</sup>

In light of that comment it is sobering to realize how little progress appeared to have been made since many of the problems and possible remedies were identified in the first (and so far only) systematic attempt to consider Parliament’s foreign policy role, which was undertaken by the Canadian Institute of International Affairs and the Canadian Study of Parliament Group *prior* to the major consultative review exercises of the 1980s and 1990s. In that study published two decades ago, David Taras had concluded:

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<sup>10</sup> See also Mark Neufeld, “Democratization in/of Canadian Foreign Policy: Critical reflections,” *Studies in political economy*, no. 58, Spring 1999, 97-119; Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, “Democratizing Canadian Foreign Policy? NGO Participation for the Copenhagen Summit for Social Development and the Beijing Conference on Women”, *Canadian Foreign Policy*, vol. 11, no. 3, Spring 1994, 100-103.

<sup>11</sup> Notably Denis Stairs, “Myths, Morals and Reality in Canadian Foreign Policy,” *International Journal*, 2003 and Kim Nossal, “‘The World We Want’? The Purposeful Confusion of Values, Goals, and Interests in Canadian Foreign Policy,” n.d. (accessed May 1, 2004 at [www.cdfai.org](http://www.cdfai.org)).

<sup>12</sup> John English, “The Member of Parliament and Foreign Policy,” in Fen Osler Hampson and Maureen Molot, eds., *Canada Among Nations 1998: Leadership and Dialogue*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1998, 79.

The pressures brought by the domestication of foreign policy have had little impact on formal relations between the executive and Parliament in Canada. Although Parliament's influence on and involvement in foreign policy is greater today than when James Early published his study [*The Art of the Possible: Government and Foreign Policy in Canada*, 1961], the structure of power has not changed. The executive still has exclusive control over the levers of decision-making despite a change in attitude among parliamentarians, a shift in the domestic and international political climates, and some reform in Parliament's foreign policy machinery. Parliament's influence has depended on idiosyncratic variables; the right issue, the right minister, the right timing. There has been little consistency or constancy. At best, Parliament is a participant in the decision-making process, one among a number of institutions and forces that can have impact.<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding the expansion of parliamentary-based activities since that was penned, perceptions of minimal legislative oversight and influence have persisted in this arena long marked by executive prerogative. Indicating an even narrower circle of control, James McCormick has referred to a continuing prime ministerial dominance of foreign policy.<sup>14</sup> (In that regard, Denis Stairs has noted Paul Martin Sr.'s view that, even within Cabinet, foreign affairs should be left to the prime minister and his foreign minister.<sup>15</sup>) McCormick also observed the tendency of senior officials he interviewed still to dismiss Parliament as irrelevant.<sup>16</sup>

One might ask how it is that the theory of democratic accountability through a parliamentary system of government can be so easily discounted when it comes to the serious business of the state's official formulation of foreign policy. What can be learned from looking at parliamentary participation to date in the processes surrounding foreign policy "white papers" and similar formal government statements?

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<sup>13</sup> David Taras, "From Bystander to Participant," in Taras, ed., *Parliament and Canadian Foreign Policy*, Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Toronto, 1985, 16. The report produced by the Canadian Study of Parliament Group (*Parliament and Foreign Affairs*, Ottawa 1984) pinned its hopes for parliamentary committee influence on: "An energetic and non-partisan chairman, a minister ... willing to support and encourage the inquiry, a small but knowledgeable staff, objective and serious committee members, and the capacity to sustain an inquiry over the several years that might be necessary to complete it." (12) All sound observations, though again more dependent on idiosyncratic variables than constituting a challenge to the structural imbalance of power as between the executive and bureaucracy and the lowly parliamentarians.

<sup>14</sup> James McCormick, "The Role of Parliament and Congress in Foreign Policy: The Case of Canada and the United States", unpublished paper, n.d.

<sup>15</sup> Denis Stairs, "Foreign Policy Consultations in a Globalizing World," *Policy Matters*, vol. 1, no. 8, December 2000, The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 39, note 11.

<sup>16</sup> McCormick, "The Role of Parliament and Congress," 23.

## The Trudeau Departure

The early Trudeau-era white paper exercises setting out a foreign policy *for* Canadians reflected both a certain “domestication” of the foreign policy agenda and an emphasis on getting Canadians to think about their national interests in a global context. They did at least open the door a crack to include more voices in the conversation and that *was* a step forward, albeit a small and tightly managed one as Denis Stairs among others have observed. Moreover Parliament, under procedural reforms introduced by the Trudeau government in 1968, did undertake a number of public hearings, notably on the issue of Canada’s role in NATO and NORAD, through its House Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence. Yet Thomas Hockin was as critical of that process as he was of *Foreign Policy for Canadians*, when it emerged, sans consideration of Canada-U.S. relations, in June 1970. A scholar of parliamentary government who subsequently co-chaired the 1985-86 parliamentary review process, Hockin was unsparing in his assessment.

The House of Commons obviously failed in its two main purposes. It failed to attract attention to the foreign policy review when the two major parties did not differ controversially on the NATO issue. Secondly, it failed in committee to take advantage of the opportunity to subject root assumptions to searching and sustained examination. By failing to do so, it could not help but summarize the commonplace unexamined assumptions which the majority of the committee probably held before the committee began its analysis.<sup>17</sup>

For all these faults, foreign affairs had entered into parliamentary discussions to a greater and more organized extent than was the case during the supposedly “golden age” of Pearsonian diplomacy. Even so, the verdict of some on this period remains dismissive. Bland and Rempel maintain that: “Parliament was hardly consulted during the so-called 1968-69 defence and foreign policy reviews.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Hockin, “The Foreign Policy Review and Decision Making in Canada,” in John Warnock and Thomas Hockin, eds., *Alliances and Illusions: Canada and the NATO-NORAD Question*, Mel Hurtig publishers, Edmonton, 1969, 128-31. See also Bruce Thordarson, *Trudeau and Foreign Policy: A Study in Decision-Making*, Oxford University Press, 1972, 134.

<sup>18</sup> Bland and Rempel, “A Vigilant Parliament,” 9.

## **Next Stop Mulroney and McGrath: Parliamentary Review of Foreign Policy Review From the Mid-1980s**

The next leap forward in review process came in the mid-1980s coinciding with the first big Mulroney government majority. As a result of the 1984 election there was a large turnover and a big class of expectant new backbenchers to manage. One of the first actions of the new Conservative government was to create a special committee on reform of the House of Commons, chaired by veteran MP James McGrath, that tabled its final report in June 1985 just as the government's foreign policy reviews were about to get underway. This strong push for parliamentary reform bears strong similarities to the current concerns about: empowering ordinary MPs; revitalizing committees (the McGrath reforms resulted in standing committee acquiring new powers to initiate studies on their own and to demand comprehensive written government responses to their reports); and enhancing expenditure review along with the means to hold the executive branch to account ( a great deal of attention focused on that aspect, abetted by the expanded powers of the Auditor General to inquire into "value for money").

The conjunction of that reform push with a government-mandated foreign policy review – instead of a declaratory "white paper", a more consultative "green paper" entitled *Competitiveness and Security* was put forward for debate – produced a few further steps towards a more formally participatory process. Yet, as I observed in a paper analysing the review: "Old habits die hard, and new cautions and complaints invariably arise." Media and academic scepticism was prevalent about the real value of all this vaunted new consultation. The *Globe and Mail* wondered whether this "new communion with Canadians" would not be just another "pointless" and "empty" exercise in consultation.<sup>19</sup> But the point of the green paper was not its much-maligned content.

In the best traditions of the "federalist style" gently disparaged by Thomas Hockin in his 1968 essay<sup>20</sup>, *process* is all. As Molot and Tomlin correctly argue, this was clearly an instance in which the medium was "more important than the message." Joe Clark's preoccupation was not with the questions in the Green paper as such, or with getting approval for specific policy changes, but with transferring the heat of public debate to the arena of a special Conservative-dominated Senate-Commons committee. This

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<sup>19</sup> "Mr. Clark Consults," *The Globe and Mail*, editorial, 16 May 1985.

<sup>20</sup> The reference is to Hockin, "Federalist Style in International Politics," in Stephen Clarkson, ed., *An Independent Foreign Policy for Canada*, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1968.



purpose could also be presented as serving the cause of parliamentary reform. Menawhile, though, the government would continue to decide foreign policy. And, if, at the end of review, Canada could continue to muddle through much as before, that might in itself be a relief.<sup>21</sup>

I also noted more generally that for both “neo-realist” critics on the right and “counter-consensus” critics on the left –

The domestication of the policy-making process merely affords the state elites another avenue of legitimation. Public opinion is used by government to mobilize support for its own agenda. Parliament can act as a weathervane or a sounding board in this process, but decision-making remains centralized and hierarchical. (...) consultation [is seen as] an ephemeral diversion. Periods of participatory democracy soon give way to quiescence and, in any event, are never a substitute for the bureaucratic decision process, whatever it faults. The External Affairs mandarins may regard themselves as a “castle under siege.” The rationalist planning ethos of the Trudeau foreign policy technocrats may have succumbed untidy reality. Such things may fuel the fascination with public review. Nevertheless, as Denis Stairs concluded in the early 1970s: “That the foreign policymaking community has not yet found these developments unduly burdensome merely reflects the failure, to date, of the domestic publics to organize successfully in ways designed for applying *significant* pressure on the decision-making process. In other words, public ventilation of the issues is more of a symbolic safety valve than an instrument of democratic assertion.”<sup>22</sup>

Looking back, one can see that the pluses from the process often were not sustained or were offset by factors that diminished its impact over the longer term. For example, the first phase of the review in the summer of 1985 – on whether Canada should embrace Reagan’s Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI, the original “Star Wars”), and on whether Canada should enter into bilateral free-trade negotiations with the U.S. (following on the affirmative recommendation of the Macdonald Commission which the Trudeau government had created) – did attract high media/public interest and engagement. Unfortunately that then fell off for the subsequent general review as the most important issues on which government decisions were pending had already been pronounced upon.

The special joint committee’s final report *Independence and Internationalism* did come up with several new ideas – in particular in the area of human rights development

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<sup>21</sup> Gerald Schmitz, “Parliamentary Reform and the Review of Canadian Foreign Policy: Where to Now?”, Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, June 1987, 14.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

its recommendation led to the establishment by Parliament of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD, now known as Rights & Democracy). The report's appeal to "constructive internationalism" also found broad acceptance. Beyond that, however, after over a year of review activity, the government's response to this report was anti-climax. As a Montreal Gazette editorial put it: "The best thing about the federal government's new foreign policy paper is just how unremarkable it is."<sup>23</sup> Some important areas covered by the review were subsequently the subject of far more in-depth and critical parliamentary examinations. For example, the House Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade produced a landmark study of international development assistance policies and programs (the Winegard report, *For Whose Benefit?*) in the following year. That study is still the only systematic parliamentary inquiry to have been done in this policy area. It is noteworthy that it was pursued on the committee's own initiative, according to its parameters, outside of a managed "white-paper" review exercise.

The special joint committee, created for the purpose of review, promptly disbanded after delivering its report and most of this work quickly disappeared from view. There was no mechanism for any follow up, and the standing committees had not been involved in the review process. In short, the episodic and ephemeral nature of the review process limited its ability to make a deep or lasting impact on the central orientations of Canadian foreign policy.

Many suggestions were made, then as now, to strengthen the ongoing capacities of parliamentary committees. However, without sustained political will to really probe and challenge existing policies, and without serious government responses that result in concrete actions, the parliamentary consultation cycle is likely to turn into a rather empty exercise. As long as the stakes are low, it should not be a surprise that parliamentary as well as media and general public interest quickly flags. The key to credible consultation is *what actually comes out of it*. The retrospective assessment of the 1985-86 review by Don Page, a former senior departmental official who was charged with overseeing the government response to *Independence and Internationalism* is instructive:

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<sup>23</sup> "We're still boy scouts," *The Montreal Gazette*, 10 December 1986.

Effectiveness will depend on Parliament's ability and willingness to hold the government responsible for implementing policy recommendations that arise from outside the bureaucracy. Ultimately, even limited democratization of foreign policy making cannot be effective without the strong leadership of the minister of foreign affairs who is responsible for making it happen. The continued willingness of the public to participate in this exercise in populism will depend as much on the bureaucratic initiative in taking these suggestions seriously in its policy making as on the actual process used to obtain the input. That is the lesson that needs to be drawn from the 1985-86 review.<sup>24</sup>

### **Parliament and the World – Lessons from the Chrétien White Papers**

The foreign and defence policy reviews of the 1990s followed another change in majority government, and were preceded by similar concerns about improving democratic consultation and strengthening parliamentary input. The Liberals' pre-election 1993 *Foreign Policy Handbook*, in which Lloyd Axworthy and his then assistant Michael Pearson played a large role, contained ambitious proposals for the "democratization of foreign policy." Some of that thrust was reflected in the party's "Red Book" platform; however, international affairs did not turn out to be a major theme of the 1993 electoral campaign (in contrast to the exceptional 1988 free-trade election). Moreover, it was André Ouellet, not the Handbook's champion Mr. Axworthy, who was handed the foreign minister post. That in itself was an indication that any changes would likely be cautiously incremental, and attuned to domestic priorities, rather than charging ahead with bold new departures.

The parliamentary roles in the 1994 foreign and defence policy reviews replicated some of the problems with the 1980s exercises while adding others. There were now two separate special joint committees preceding the publication of two separate white papers. The one on broader foreign affairs policies (*Canada in the World*) only appeared several months after the one on defence policy, when if anything, the reverse would have been more logical. There was talk of a need for integration and coherence among all international policy instruments, but no overarching framework for achieving this. (While the subsequent Axworthy "human security" approach had some antecedents in *Canada in*

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<sup>24</sup> Don Page, "Populism in Canadian foreign policy: the 1986 review revisited," *Canadian Public Administration*, Winter 1994, 597.

*the World*, it owed more to his personal vision and also mostly bypassed large areas of established diplomatic, trade, defence and development policy.)

In addition, the parallel parliamentary review processes almost never intersected. There was no attempt to have the two committees come together to forge a common position on matters of mutual concern in regard to international security (recall that there had already been a major terrorist attempt in 1993 to blow up the World Trade Centre towers). So while the production of fairly restrained reports avoided serious inconsistencies, each committee generally ignored the other's work.

And once again, the standing committees were not involved, which meant that after an intensive year of multiple cross-country consultations, there was very little follow up after the special joint committees disbanded and it was back to committee business as usual in each chamber.

The parliamentary review exercises that preceded the new government's formal policy statements had been launched with great expectations and offered a seemingly huge open-ended array of issues for bringing to bear fresh perspectives. But except for a few areas, the results were rather tame. Several partial exceptions on the foreign policy side tell the tale of steps forward that either soon slipped away or proved not to have staying power. A notable case in point is what happened to the major push on promoting "culture and education" stimulated by a provocative commissioned essay from John Ralston Saul. This vaunted "third pillar" was almost instantly hit by the deficit-cutting axe of then Finance Minister Paul Martin's 1995 Budget. As a prescient article in *The Economist* a year earlier had observed of the review process: "What difference will it all make? ... foreign policy will probably still be made by the officials around the finance minister, Paul Martin."<sup>25</sup> Too true, as events were to confirm. Foreign aid spending would also quickly fall victim to the deficit, sinking to well below the levels of the Mulroney years.

Another example would be the sad fate of the scaled-down proposals on "democratizing" foreign policy that led to creating the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development. Like the national forums that disappeared within a few years, this

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<sup>25</sup> Schmitz, "The State, the Public, and the Decennial Refashioning of Canadian Foreign Policy: Democratizing Diminished Expectations or Demanding a New Departure?", Paper presented to the CPSA annual meeting June 1995, 8.

initiative has now also run its course.<sup>26</sup> David Malone, in his rather acerbic and oft-cited 2001 evaluation of the review and result in the form of *Canada in the World* argued that its “weakest sections ... have to do with the engagement of Canadians on policy formulation and implementation.”<sup>27</sup> From my own vantage point close to the parliamentary side of the 1994 review process I reflected that : “Reviews tend to become managed affairs which refashion the fundamentals without necessarily informing or educating broad public opinion in such a way that a more democratic societal vision of Canada’s global role results. In other words, faute de mieux, the arena of foreign policy engagement continues to be quite narrowly circumscribed. Although some elements of parliament and various ‘stakeholders’ are involved, usually this is at the margins, as the government conducts foreign policy largely according to its own ‘raisons d’état’ and its own perceptions of the public mood.”<sup>28</sup>

That assessment was reaffirmed in a chapter on policy dialogue written with Tim Draimin (then policy coordinator for the national NGO umbrella group, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, which had made some of the most innovative proposals for democratic policy and process reforms to the 1994 review committees) for a 1997 book, *Strategies of Public Engagement*, concurring with the scepticism (expressed by Janice Stein and Denis Stairs among others<sup>29</sup>) that these white-paper reviews had failed to create any significant new *and ongoing* public capacity for a level of policy analysis that would be taken seriously in actual decision-making. As Draimin and I posed the question: “How is the public policy process moved from one of managing stakeholders to managing policy development?”<sup>30</sup>

That question links back to Malone’s conclusions casting large doubts on whether the 1994-95 review episode really had any significant impact on either policy or resource allocations. Malone attributes the “three-pillars” formulation of *Canada in the World* to

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<sup>26</sup> Technically the Centre still had a curious lingering afterlife into 2005; however since 2003 it has had no visible program activity and appeared to be in the process of being wound up.

<sup>27</sup> David Malone, “Foreign policy reviews reconsidered,” *International Journal*, Autumn 2001, 575.

<sup>28</sup> Schmitz 1995, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Janice Stein, “Ideas, Even Good Ideas, Are Not Enough : Changing Canada’s Foreign and Defence Policies,” *International Journal*, vol. 50, Winter 1994-95, 40-70; Denis Stairs, “The Public Politics of the Canadian Defence and Foreign Policy Reviews,” *Canadian Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, Spring 1995, 91-116.

<sup>30</sup> Gerald Schmitz and Tim Draimin, “Effective Policy Dialogue in the North: A View from Canada,” in David Gillies, ed., *Strategies of Public Engagement: Shaping a Canadian Agenda for International Co-operation*, McGill Queen’s University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 1997, 127.

the design of then deputy minister Gordon Smith. (It certainly did not emanate from any of the parliamentary ruminations.) Although I would not go so far as William Hogg to suggest that Canadian foreign policy goals and objectives have remained virtually unchanged over the past half century<sup>31</sup>, the variations in how successive governments have chosen to present them promote differences that often turn out to be more superficial than substantive.<sup>32</sup> In a paper prepared for the Canadian Defense & Foreign Affairs Institute, Malone sums up the missed opportunity and slight residue of this last major review as follows:

The review failed to alter the essential thrust of foreign policy under previous governments and, to some degree, involved smoke and mirrors, particularly on policy initiatives reliant on financial resources. The failure to agree on a consolidated review of defence, aid, and foreign policy (as had been done, to some degree, with separate reports in 1985-86) was symptomatic of high-level lack of interest. To be meaningful, such an exercise would have had to include also the international activities of the Department of Finance, a major player in international economic relations, and perhaps those of the Department of the Environment. No sense emerged that the government's many foreign policy instruments and foreign policy relevant programmes served the objectives of a master plan for international relations. (...) The institutional and other initiatives announced in *Canada in the World* were pitifully modest, although the creation of DFAIT's Global Issues Bureau has proved a success.<sup>33</sup>

Given how the above patterns have played out, it seems to me that there are some lessons that could be drawn from Parliament's rather desultory role in white (or green) paper activities to date in order to improve the chances of having more effective review processes in future.

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<sup>31</sup> William Hogg, "Plus ça change: continuity, change and culture in foreign policy white papers," *International Journal*, vol. 59, no. 3, Summer 2004.

<sup>32</sup> As a former ambassador John Noble has written: "While the rhetoric of the Martin government's *International Policy Review* may try to be innovative, Canada's fundamental foreign policy objectives have and will remain more or less constant. The means to try to achieve those objectives may well be different." ("Do Foreign Policy Reviews make a Difference?", *Policy Options*, vol. 26, no. 2, February 2005, 46.)

<sup>33</sup> David Malone, "Canadian Foreign Policy Post-9/11: Institutional and Other Challenges," n.d. (accessed May 1, 2004 at [www.cdfai.org](http://www.cdfai.org)). Any parliamentary residue from 1994 would seem to be slighter still, even in the minds of the drafters of *Canada in the World*. Gordon Smith, in "Managing Canada's Foreign Affairs" (May 2003), another in the series of papers prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, mentions in passing the private sector and NGOs, but not parliament, as being among the players in the making of foreign policy. It is also interesting to note that, for all the talk of a "whole of government" approach in the 2005 *International Policy Statement*, the roles of the departments of finance and the environment are barely mentioned much less fully integrated into the new framework.

A first and foremost lesson would be to try to focus attention on those key policy issues and options that can galvanize public interest, where there are real stakes and decisions yet to be taken. Review has to engage areas in which government is open to at least some evolution in its position; otherwise the whole premise is pointless. It then becomes a matter of getting beyond consultations for their own sake that end up going through the motions of re-examining everything while changing almost nothing.

A second lesson would be to involve the permanent parliamentary standing committees from the outset, and to enhance the capacity of these underutilized existing vehicles to dig deeper into policy matters and to sustain the follow up necessary to hold government accountable for its decisions and the implementation of its commitments. (As Denis Stairs has rightly pointed out, this is precisely what elected representatives should be doing. Moreover, the partisan politicians sitting on these committees are able to engage in free-wheeling public debate; not so bureaucrats running departmentally-managed “consultations” who must ultimately report to government masters.<sup>34</sup>)

A third lesson would also agree with Stairs on something else: the need to avoid flights of rhetoric and grand “mission statements” without the resources to back them up. Along with the invitation to creative rethinking, there has to be an underlying discipline to concentrate on what is deliverable in high priority areas.

In the final analysis, what matters more than high-minded assertions is getting political and ministerial support behind concrete objectives. Former Minister Lloyd Axworthy’s “human security” agenda and the accomplishments of the “Ottawa process” were idea-driven normative endeavours that also prove this point because they required focused and sustained political initiative every step of the way. It is worth noting as well that the formal phase of the Chrétien-era reviews provided little of the stimulus for this subsequent activism. Although one can find some inklings of a human security approach in *Canada in the World*, it is instructive that Axworthy made no reference to this official document in *Navigating a New World*, the 400-page chronicle of his experience as foreign minister. Future reviews will obviously have to come up with better ways to have

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<sup>34</sup> As Stairs has written, “the importance of the parliamentary process and the potential value of well-run hearings of parliamentary committees should not be underestimated. A democratic politics requires the careful nurturing of its political institutions. It cannot rely on the happenstance distribution of interest group initiatives at the bureaucratic level to accomplish that purpose.” (“Foreign Policy Consultations in a Globalizing World,” 38)

a real impact on Canada's ongoing engagement in global affairs if they are to warrant a significant, and sustained, strengthening of parliamentary and public interest.

### **Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – “9/11” Trumps the “Update”**

With the turn of the millennium, and more significantly the departure of Lloyd Axworthy who did not run in the November 2000 election, bureaucratic thoughts began to turn to a refurbishing of *Canada in the World* under a new minister John Manley with more traditional priorities returning to the fore. No major change of direction was in the offing. But the coincident coming to power of a conservative Bush presidency in the United States indicated at the very least that considerable attention should be devoted to how best to manage this crucial bilateral relationship. A concentration on continental ties fit with the Manley approach, and looking south was also reinforced by Canada's hosting of the Summit of the Americas in the spring of 2001.

During that summer, as I was preparing for a prospective major parliamentary study of North American relationships, there were persistent rumblings about some sort of foreign policy “update” being manufactured within the Pearson building. That was fine, if and when it came. The House Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (SCFAIT), under the then leadership of future minister Bill Graham, was already moving towards an examination of the Canada-U.S. issues that would surely be a central part of any update.

I distinctly remember that Tuesday morning of September 11, 2001, working on refining a preliminary working outline for the committee's North American study, when a colleague rushed by with the news that a plane had hit one of the World Trade Centre towers. Needless to say, a hastily revised outline put security and border issues at the forefront when it was presented to committee members.

It is often said that events determine the actual conduct of foreign policy more than the preconceived notions of policymakers, much less half-remembered statements in some previous policy document. There is also the none-too-subtle dig at Canada which holds that serious players in the game of international relations get on with looking after



their interests and getting things done, rather than indulging themselves in navel-gazing reviews and other forms of high-minded but inconsequential busywork.

In this case, the immediate reverberations from the mega-shock next door put a swift end to any dithering about updates. “9/11” did more than trump whatever had been slowly percolating in the Pearson building, it upped the ante and fast-tracked to the front burner the most critical concerns in relations with Washington. Parliamentary committees followed suit, with a number of them in hot pursuit of various border-related aspects. SCFAIT produced two reports within several months, including the first phase of a mammoth study on advancing North American relations that continued throughout the next year.<sup>35</sup>

When the final report of that study was tabled in December 2002, the largest and most complex in the committee’s history, it in effect covered much of the ground that would have been the territory of any review.<sup>36</sup> The report was largely embraced by the government and a number of its proposals have found echoes in subsequent policy musings, including by Paul Martin both before and since becoming prime minister. Indeed this report is the only parliamentary committee report to be explicitly cited in the government’s April 2005 *International Policy Statement (IPS)*.<sup>37</sup> Moreover during 2002, SCFAIT, at Prime Minister Chrétien’s request, also undertook a large-scale review of Canada’s G8 role leading up to the Kananaskis Summit. The committee’s report on that agenda, including the global fight against terrorism and the Canadian emphasis on African development and reform, addressed these additional important areas of foreign policy in a post-9/11 context.<sup>38</sup> In short, a de facto parliamentary review of sorts had taken place that was in fact far more detailed in its consideration of these subjects than had been the case for the general review of 1994.

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<sup>35</sup> House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Towards a Secure and Trade-Efficient Border*, November 2001; *Preliminary Report: Canada and the North American Challenge: Managing Relations in Light of the New Security Environment*, December 2001.

<sup>36</sup> SCFAIT, *Partners in North America : Advancing Canada’s Relations with the United States and Mexico*, December 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Government of Canada, *Canada’s International Policy Statement: A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, April 2005, “Diplomacy”, 7.

<sup>38</sup> SCFAIT, *Securing Progress for Africa and the World : A Report on Canadian Priorities for the 2002 G8 Summit*, June 2002.

## Parliament and the “Dialogue” Blues

While the parliamentary committee was thus engaged, its former chair elevated to the post of minister in the cabinet shuffle of January 2002 was attempting to deliver on a mandate for some kind of international policy review exercise, the intention of which was reconfirmed in the September 2002 Speech from the Throne. The eventual scaled-back result, after many twists and pauses, was Bill Graham’s “Dialogue on Foreign Policy” launched on a frigid Ottawa day in January 2003. As a framework for this long-promised consultation with Canadians, the Department released a slim blue booklet containing an approach that reworked but did not substantially deviate from the “three pillars” in *Canada in the World*, followed by a series of fairly general questions. Several of these seemed almost rhetorical and hardly likely to invite profound policy introspection, if indeed that is what was desired.

Some of those who had been the most insistent in calling for a wide-ranging review to re-energize the policy machinery in the wake of new challenges were obviously disappointed with what they saw as a half-hearted and likely interim measure. The process was essentially ministerially driven with the assistance of the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development in organizing a web forum and a cross-country series of “townhall” sessions with Graham. In terms of parliamentary response, SCFAIT members curbed their enthusiasm for this “quasi review”, as the Conference Board called it<sup>39</sup>, but dutifully held a few hearings on the Dialogue paper and produced a short summary report (the only parliamentary committee to do so) that mainly reaffirmed some familiar touchstones: the need for increased resources, strengthened capabilities and linkages across the “three Ds” of diplomacy, development, and defence; for more effective management of Canada-U.S. relations – citing its December 2002 report; and for using a “margin of manoeuvre” to advance multilateralist approaches and to promote Canadian interests and values abroad.<sup>40</sup> In any event, the committee was already looking ahead to its far more intensive, and rewarding, study of the as yet little-explored area of Canada’s relations with Muslim countries, resulting in another weighty report released the next

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<sup>39</sup> The Conference Board of Canada, *Performance and Potential 2003-04: Defining the Canadian Advantage*, chapter 4 “Revitalizing Canadian Foreign Policy,” 98.

<sup>40</sup> SCFAIT, *A Contribution to the Foreign Policy Dialogue*, May 2003.

year.<sup>41</sup> (That report, even though it dealt with contentious Middle East issues, was adopted twice by all-party consensus and again put the committee ahead of the review curve with respect to a complex area of concern scarcely addressed in the IPS.<sup>42</sup>)

The 2003 Dialogue did have some innovative dimensions and afforded opportunities for ordinary citizens to interact with the minister in townhalls, in addition to the usual spate of expert roundtables and briefs from interest and advocacy groups. Nonetheless, the sum of all these Dialogue activities was, not surprisingly, underwhelming. For one thing, the Dialogue was never given a mandate to set a new direction for Canadian foreign policy, and was in fact explicitly constrained from doing more than appearing to record the state of Canadians' views on the broad questions it posed. It was to be at most a sounding board; anything **but** a white paper committing government to specific action.

Evidence of that was the quiet releasing of the Dialogue *Report to Canadians* in late June on a Friday before the long holiday weekend. The document was never tabled in Parliament and its impact was deliberately kept to a minimum.<sup>43</sup> Although SCFAIT had recommended that the minister "should appear before the Committee at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss the results and implications of the dialogue process," that never happened.<sup>44</sup> By the fall of 2003 the Dialogue had effectively disappeared, except for whatever after-effects might resurface in ministerial speeches or be genuflected to in the pending "real" International Policy Review (IPR) put off for at least another year. When that review cum government statement finally reached the public in the spring of 2005, although the accompanying Department of Foreign Affairs press release was careful to refer to the contribution of the Dialogue, there was no reference to either the Dialogue process or findings in the IPS documents themselves.

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<sup>41</sup> SCFAIT, *Exploring Canada's Relations with the Countries of the Muslim World*, March 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Because the report was first adopted shortly before the 2004 election it had to be readopted in October 2004 by the reconstituted committee of the new minority parliament. The government response to the report tabled in March 2005 stated that its findings would be explicitly cited in the IPS. However that proved not to be the case, nor was there any mention of the Department of Foreign Affairs Working Group on Canada's Relations with Muslim Communities created as a result of the committee's report.

<sup>43</sup> Although heavily vetted, it also largely bypassed formal Cabinet consideration. The *Report* completed a process seen by many in the senior bureaucracy as more an inconvenience than an expression of government priorities. Moreover, the Dialogue had taken place separate from an internal PCO Task Force on the International Policy Framework that produced a report in July 2003, *Towards an International Policy Framework for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, and never publicly released.

<sup>44</sup> SCFAIT, *A Contribution to the Foreign Policy Dialogue*, 16.

Denis Stairs may be overly suspicious in ascribing to such public-opinion exercises a “hidden purpose” of political manipulation – after all, by the time the Dialogue finally got off the ground its limitations were already apparent – but he has a point in describing the preference of officialdom (not necessarily the minister) for “language that goes through the motions, but does not unduly inconvenience the policy community by confining its freedom of manoeuvre.”<sup>45</sup>

One lesson I would draw from close participant observation of the Dialogue process (while on secondment to the Department during its key months) is that consultation can only bear fruit when it is connected to deliverable outputs. By all means enlarge the means for engaging public debate on foreign policy – exploring creative uses of new interactive technologies, web-based formats, perhaps televised “townhalls,” experimenting with parliamentary outreach through e-consultations, and so on. But the participants in these activities have to feel that their contributions are feeding into a real decision process, which at the end of the day will have some real discernable effect on policy directions. Otherwise, they, and an already cynical media, will turn off and disengage. Parliamentarians, too, whatever one might think of them and their role, are no more interested in wasting their time than anyone else.

In the Dialogue’s defence, it should be said – contra the half-serious Stairsian hypothesis that the more “democratized” the process the more vacuous, disingenuous and irrelevant the result – there were genuine elements of public engagement to it, however improvised or ephemeral, and it did tap into a deep chord of Canadian values to which there is more than “mythical” attachment.<sup>46</sup> Given frustration over seemingly interminable consultation and review processes, and an understandable impatience for good intentions to lead to more effective actions, there is a danger of these aspects being

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<sup>45</sup> Denis Stairs, “Foreign Policy White Papers : The Canadian Experience,” 9.

<sup>46</sup> During 2003, the Ottawa-based Canadian Policy Research Networks conducted an extensive series of cross-Canada citizen dialogues on “the kind of Canada we want” in order to survey public attitudes in depth. Among the overall findings reported in *Citizens’ Dialogue on Canada’s Future: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Contract* (April 2003, for details see [www.cprn.org](http://www.cprn.org)) were the following:

- “Canadians prize diversity, but *within* a core set of Canadian values. Their desire to clarify and sustain those values increases as diversity increases.
- That set of distinctly Canadian values, shared by citizens from coast to coast, differentiates us from our neighbors – with respect to the role of government, the balance between individual and community, our attitude to the rest of the world, and our reliance on social norms rather than legalism and litigation. This is a source of pride and a basis for building our distinctive community in the future.”

unfairly undervalued, with the risk that the dimension of seeking to expand the circle of democratic deliberation will be underplayed in future policy development.

Faute de mieux, the Dialogue report also became a target for cranky reactions grinding divergent axes based on quite contradictory readings.<sup>47</sup> And some scolds, eschewing this kind of public consultation as pandering to organized pressure groups, argued instead for government to drop the soft listening pose and grasp the nettle of educating Canadians with a sobering reality check.<sup>48</sup> Frankly, most of these positions could be picked apart even more than the Dialogue, and it is hard to see how any of them – reflecting in the main the biases of a small number of academics and journalists – afford a firmer basis for forging pan-Canadian consensus around foreign policy goals.

As for considering parliamentary roles in the light of a Dialogue post-mortem, one would hope that these might avoid repeating a desultory outcome of once-over-lightly passing reactions to the scripted documents of highly managed consultation processes. At the same time, some of the criticisms of these seem as exaggerated as the rhetorical expectations they are accused of inflating. There is certainly no need to give up on democratization goals in foreign policy development. Nor, pace Denis Stairs and Douglas Ross, will matters be advanced by impatiently writing off flawed consultation efforts to date as, in effect, “decoys” to deflect attention from underperforming

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<sup>47</sup> For example, Heather Smith’s paper (“The Green Pages of the White Papers ... or ‘Whatever’ Paper”), while dismissing multiple references to the challenges of environmentally sustainable development as mere words signifying nothing, suggests that compared to *Canada in the World*: “The securitization of the environment is even more apparent in the *Dialogue* documents which legitimize ‘discourses of danger’ in which the entire document appears embedded” (19). Another B.C. academic Douglas Ross on the contrary sees the Dialogue as avoiding pressing security matters altogether. In an angry hyperbolic rant he finds it “reflected a pattern of foreign policy discussion that was deeply disappointing in its intellectual shallowness, but was wholly appropriate to Canadian society’s enfeebled, marginalized, psychologically de-belliezed condition. The final document of the 2003 foreign policy ‘consultation’ gave prominent place to the quest for prosperity and the promotion of Canadian values at a time when international security relations were going through the most dramatic transformation since the end of the Cold War ...” (“Foreign Policy Challenges for Paul Martin,” *International Journal*, Autumn 2003, 548ff.)

<sup>48</sup> In particular, the report produced by the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute in late 2003, *In the National Interest: Canadian Foreign Policy in an Insecure World*, conveys an underlying tone that Canadians are living in a fools’ paradise and that “democratic” consultations merely flatter this false consciousness (or get captured by organized special interests) instead of waking up the public to the hard realities of Canada’s parlous and perilous international position. The authors obviously put their own highly contestable, if expert, judgements ahead of the generally expressed preferences of Canadians. Moreover, they scorn talk of values, arguing the imperative of a singular focus on realistic interests. Yet as David Malone, who contributed a background paper to the CDFAI process, has sagely observed: “Both values and interests are important to Canadians. ... The ‘values’ versus ‘interests’ debate thus strikes me as a red herring of limited interest to foreign policy in the real world.” (“A Question of Style,” *Literary Review of Canada*, March 2004, 5.)

government action or as “narcissistic” public-relations indulgences. Stairs does allow that participation in policy review exercises may have an educational benefit for politicians, especially those new to the field of foreign affairs. However that in itself is clearly not a sufficient justification for expending more energy and resources on increasing democratic engagement. Improving the policy development process, and providing learning opportunities for its players, must also serve the overarching purpose of strengthening policy substance and implementation. A more democratic Canadian foreign policy must also demonstrate that it can do a better job of advancing Canadian aspirations and interests in the world.

### **Power to the Parliament? The Fate of Martin’s Promise and International Policy Review**

It is hard to disagree with the analysis that simply increasing the number of putatively democratic activities may accomplish little in terms of real policy changes, or even in terms of building a sustained capacity for broader, deeper, and genuinely deliberative public engagement in foreign policy formulation, as in other areas of Canadian public policy. This is not a particular insight of academics. Parliamentarians are among those most acutely aware of, and affected by, this ongoing “democratic deficit” dilemma. During the last parliament a report released by the co-chairs and vice-chair of the Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament underlined their observation that “the apparent parallels between the frustration expressed by citizens and that felt by Parliamentarians can, and should, serve as a reminder that reforming Parliament does not concern only the men and women who serve in its chambers. To be successful, an agenda for reform will aim to bring *citizens* – as well as their representatives – back to the centre of democratic activity.”<sup>49</sup>

Given the frequent musings of Prime Minister Martin, along with other party leaders, on strengthening parliamentary institutions as a key element of redressing democratic deficits, it was expected that reform intentions would carry over strongly into

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<sup>49</sup> *The Parliament We Want : Parliamentarians’ Views on Parliamentary Reform*, A report prepared by the Library of Parliament under the direction of Carolyn Bennett MP, Deborah Grey MP, Senator Yves Morin with Graham Fox and William Young, Ottawa, December 2003, 6.

the minority 38<sup>th</sup> parliament. The measures introduced in the first months of 2004 had been at most a modest down-payment on that promise of change. In the area of foreign policy, the Liberal 2004 election platform referred to its International Policy Review (IPR) being completed and made public in the fall of 2004, with parliamentarians and Canadians having “the opportunity to debate its analysis and implications.”<sup>50</sup> Some commentators, however, noting that international issues played little role in the electoral campaign, predicted that progress on them would be dependent on what one called “the daily drama of minority government.”<sup>51</sup>

The minority parliament elected in June 2004 can be seen to fit the description of “paradoxical but not without potential” including in the area of international affairs review. While the operations of parliament did not change radically (things like increased resources for committees would probably have happened anyway), the government’s constant need to seek support both within and beyond its own ranks was in itself an incentive for parliamentarians to assert themselves. They could not be taken for granted. Linked to showdowns and negotiations over the Speech from the Throne, the Budget, and threatened non-confidence motions, opposition parties were able to extract some important concessions from the government. The ministerial party was forced to listen to backbench and opposition points of view in the House of Commons and its committees; the latter’s collective majority clout occasionally prevailing over the government’s preferences.

The most visible evidence of this as it affects international policy was ironically related to an issue of departmental machinery to which parliamentarians had rarely devoted attention in the past. Legislation (Bills C-31 and C-32) required to give a statutory seal of approval to the splitting of DFAIT into two separate departments – Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) and International Trade Canada (ITCan) – underway since the heady first days of the Martin majority government but only introduced in Parliament in early 2005, went down to decisive defeat in February 2005. In the second-reading debate on the bills not only were opposition spokespersons able to exploit the weakness of the government’s case for reorganization, given the strong criticism of it by journalists

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<sup>50</sup> *Moving Canada Forward : The Paul Martin Plan for Getting Things Done*, 11.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Manthorpe, “Foreign affairs will continue to suffer after the election,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 4 July 2004.

and former senior diplomats among others, they also used the opportunity to vent their discontent over the delays in delivering the IPR that had been promised again in the October 2004 Throne Speech and repeatedly thereafter in ministerial pronouncements. It was argued that logically significant changes in foreign policy structures should be the product of review, not its antecedent. (In fact, the idea of dividing the departments had never surfaced in any of the consultations that took place during the 2003 Dialogue process leading up to the IPR.) Indeed opposition members of SCFAIT were so exercised that they combined to vote a \$1 symbolic reduction in the FAC 2004-2005 supplementary estimates to protest the government seeming to proceed with the administrative changes notwithstanding the legislative defeats.<sup>52</sup>

When *Canada's International Policy Statement* finally appeared in April 2005 it did concede that “an advisory and consultative process” would be established to consider “issues raised in Parliament and by stakeholders”.<sup>53</sup> But released in an atmosphere of minority jeopardy, it was unclear what would come next. This IPS was, like *Canada in the World*, a statement of government policy – in effect, a white paper. Although contained therein is a promise of annual updates to Parliament by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, only the Defence paper explicitly calls for study of its proposals by the parliamentary committees on defence. At the same time, a letter sent by the four ministers to committee chairs (but not publicized) asked that the committees “consult widely with Canadians and report their views and recommendations on the future direction of Canada’s international policies”.<sup>54</sup>

It was left to each committee to react to that invitation within the highly unpredictable contingencies of the ensuing months. Beyond some initial hearings, how much of SCFAIT’s ambitious plans for a comprehensive examination of the IPS – involving roundtables, cross-country hearings, an electronic consultation and

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<sup>52</sup> For details see Schmitz and Lee, forthcoming.

<sup>53</sup> Government of Canada, *Canada's International Policy Statement: A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, released 19 April 2005, “Diplomacy”, 32; “Commerce”, 25.

<sup>54</sup> Letter of 19 April 2005 to SCFAIT Chair Dr. Bernard Patry signed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of National Defence Bill Graham, Minister of International Cooperation Aileen Carroll, and Minister of International Cooperation James Peterson. (Ironically, the original French version of this letter mistakenly referred to Dr. Patry as a Senator and the English version to the committee as the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence. Notwithstanding the IPS being many months overdue, such errors suggest the manner of its release was nonetheless rushed.)



international travel – would ever be realized remained, like so much else, hostage to the shifting fortunes of shaky minority and electoral circumstance.

### A Post-IPS Postscript

*Over the past two years, we have held numerous consultations with Canadians and with Parliament, but also among ourselves, the ministers and the Prime Minister. And I would say that we were not long in agreeing on what I call “Canada’s international personality”.*

– Hon. Pierre Pettigrew<sup>55</sup>

*[foreign policy reviews] are really irrelevant to the establishment of what the priorities are. ... the only value of these reviews, as far as I can see, is to engage the public in a consultation process. Otherwise, I don’t see that they have any great value whatsoever.”*

– James Bartleman<sup>56</sup>

*... engaging Canadians as this committee is doing now is the next step in this very important process [of the IPS] because as you know, the public was not part of this process, at least as it was written. There was the Dialogue that Mr. Graham led in early 2003 but the public has not been part of this process and if this is going to be sold to Canadians and embraced by Canadians they have to be brought in.*

– Andrew Cohen<sup>57</sup>

These remarks made shortly after the release of the IPS, by a current minister of foreign affairs, a former prime minister’s foreign policy advisor during the 1994 review, and a prominent journalist writing on international affairs, illustrate some of the paradoxes of the unfinished business left in the wake of the Martin IPR, and of the parliamentary role within that. The first suggests that all the consultation needed has already taken place and indeed has led to a positive normative consensus on what Canada stands for internationally. The second suggests that the only value of review lies in consultation,

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<sup>55</sup> “Confidence and Conscience: Canada’s International Personality,” Notes for an Address by the Hon. Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Conseil des Relations Internationales de Montréal, 27 April 2005.

<sup>56</sup> “Of irrelevant foreign policy reviews and inane cocktail parties”, Interview with James Bartleman, *Diplomat and International Canada*, May-June 2005, 9.

<sup>57</sup> SCFAIT, *Evidence*, 3 May 2005.

but that these processes nevertheless make no difference to the actual conduct of foreign policy. The third suggests that involvement by parliament and the public is imperative to securing support for foreign policy priorities, and that this has yet to take place in the case of those put forward in the IPS.

Phrases such as “model citizen” and “international personality”, while resonating with the attractive image that many Canadians would wish for their country in the world – to wit, a “role of pride and influence” with, one hopes, actions to match the rhetoric – do not obviate the need for ongoing democratic debates over the making, and implementing, of often difficult international policy decisions. For example, in regard to addressing the problems of failed and failing states as emphasized in the IPS across the fields of diplomacy, development, and defence (the “3Ds”), there are important questions still needing to be asked about where, when, how, and how much Canada should, or should not, intervene in the hard cases confronting the world community.

It will take more than high-minded statements of purpose every decade or so to define the appropriate, and feasible, Canadian roles in these and many other areas of international policy choice. Former DFAIT Deputy Minister Reid Morden put it well in testimony to SCFAIT during its hearings on the Dialogue: “The problem we grapple with today is how we exercise our sovereignty within a realistic margin of manoeuvre.” He went on to say: “I’m reminded that Marshall McLuhan once put a quiz to a class of his in which he started a phrase saying “I’m as Canadian as possible”, and the students had to complete the phrase. The winner was, “I’m as Canadian as possible under the circumstances”.<sup>58</sup>

The IPS commitment to periodic annual update statements by the Minister of Foreign Affairs will certainly be an advance if followed through, and if undertaken seriously accompanied by an equally serious parliamentary and public debate. Unfortunately the IPS documents say almost nothing about the latter. The IPS Overview does affirm that the “new diplomacy” will “seek regular input from Canadian NGOs, labour unions, business groups, academics and professional bodies”. However there is no discussion, much less elaboration, as to how.

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<sup>58</sup> SCFAIT, *Evidence*, 10 April 2003.

The Canadian Council for International Cooperation, appearing before SCFAIT (on the very day the government barely survived a Budget confidence vote), underlined the point that there had not been any real direct public consultation process during the formulation of the IPS itself.<sup>59</sup> CCIC appealed for the committee to pursue such a process to address the statement's deficiencies and in a written commentary stated that:

There are references to engaging Canadians in dialogue in the *Development* paper, but they are linked to comments about awareness and understanding. It is not clear if the latter includes participation in policy dialogue. The discussion in the *Diplomacy* paper about building policy capacity makes no mention of either public or civil society roles. This lack of consistency on public engagement must be explicitly addressed by expanding opportunities and mechanisms for dialogue and debate on Canada's "whole-of-government" international policy.<sup>60</sup>

In the IPS Overview discussion there is also no mention of Parliament, of what has happened to the outreach work of the abandoned Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, or even of the department's web-based discussion forums started in late 2004.

With respect to advancing parliamentary roles as part of a more regular, rigorous and results-oriented review process, it may seem rather ironic, but I would suggest going back to the future in taking up what former minister Lloyd Axworthy had ambitiously suggested to SCFAIT in an appearance in April 1996 when he urged the committee to institute an annual process of publicly reviewing the government's foreign policy priorities in specific and concrete terms. That presumes, of course, providing the committee with the necessary resources to do the job, and with some assurance that its efforts will in fact have a significant effect on the year-over-year evolution of the government's international policies.

Notwithstanding the increasing fractiousness, some would say dysfunctionality, of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parliament in 2005, the circumstances of a minority-government environment – especially if these persist over several years and the course of several parliaments – may require policymakers to take parliamentary processes more seriously, and may also offer opportunities for policy influence to be brought to bear in ways that cannot be

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<sup>59</sup> SCFAIT, *Evidence*, 19 May 2005.

<sup>60</sup> "A Role of Pride and Influence in the World : Canada's International Policy Statement – A CCIC Commentary", April 2005, 11 (accessed at [www.ccic.ca](http://www.ccic.ca) ).

tightly managed from the centre. With members of all political parties having opportunities to exert leverage, the parameters of future policy reviews covering diplomacy, development, defence and trade may also have to be negotiated on a genuinely inter-party basis or risk being stalled at the starting gate.

Looking ahead, we will need more than just good exposés of the parliamentary paradoxes, weaknesses and shortcomings of past review processes. We will need creative, practical good ideas – from civil society, the academy, and parliamentarians themselves – on how to strengthen the representative institutions we have while designing better, more democratic, and effective means of public engagement and accountability around issues of international policy that increasingly affect all Canadians.

That challenge awaits future parliaments, whatever the fate of the white paper that the Martin government's painfully protracted attempt at an integrated review finally delivered to the mercies of a fractured fragile minority parliament in the spring of 2005.

Foreign Policy for Canadians (1970), Canada's International Relations (1986), Canada in the World (1995) and A Role of Pride and Influence in the World (2003) are the titles of Canada's four most recent foreign policy white papers.<sup>8</sup> These documents, produced in response to approximately six and a half years of consultations with Canadians, as part of the foreign policy review process, and comprising 475 pages of English text, strive to encapsulate the high minded notions of the various governments that devised them.<sup>12</sup> Canadian Oxford Dictionary, s.v. "white paper."<sup>13</sup> Audrey Doerr, "The Role of Coloured Papers," in Canadian Public Administration Vol 25 No. 3 (Fall 1982): 367. 7. The foreign relations of Canada are Canada's relations with other governments and nations. Britain was the chief foreign contact before World War II. Since then Canada's most important relationship, being the largest trading relationship in the world, is with the United States. However, Canadian governments have traditionally maintained active relations with other nations, mostly through multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth of Nations, La Francophonie, the The White Paper sees Australia's role is upholding international law, universal standards of human rights, good governance, transparency and accountability. Those are enviable goals and one wishes that they actually reflected Australian Government practice of recent decades.<sup>14</sup> The White Paper seems similarly ignorant of the fact that China and the ten ASEAN nations have reached an agreed framework under which they will settle outstanding issues in the South China Sea.<sup>15</sup> This is to say the least curious, particularly as there is considerable potential for Australia to benefit from the BRI. The BRI is, to use president Xi's term, a "win-win" situation where all parties derive a benefit. They do so on the basis of infrastructure and related investment without a shot being fired. Foreign Policy White Papers and the Role of Canada's Parliament: Paradoxical But Not Without Potential. Gerald J. Schmitz Principal analyst, international affairs Parliamentary Information and Research Service. Library of Parliament, Ottawa.<sup>16</sup> experience with foreign policy white papers has, in contrast to Canada's, been explicitly and unapologetically executive-driven. At the same time, the addition of elaborate. 3 As Thomas Hockin once summed up the paradox: "It is not surprising that some people get a little confused about parliamentary democracy in Canada. We are told that Parliament is sovereign, but we know that major decisions on policy are made elsewhere. How are we to come to terms with this great gulf between appearances and reality?"